

Finding communication methods specific to stakeholder needs in today's crisis communication landscape



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About the Author

The author, Kay Pavel, was the Communications Specialist at South Washington County Schools while this research was being conducted. Previously, she was the Television Producer of the organization. Part of her duties included creating a favorable public image of the school district; using the written language to communicate with various publics; maintaining positive working relationships with parents, students, staff and community members; and spearheading creative projects from concept to completion including web, video and web work. Currently, Pavel is the Assistant Director of Communications and Public Relations at Anoka-Hennepin Schools.

Executive Summary

School communicators are dealing with a parent's most precious commodity, their children. This research shows that parents expect to receive crisis communications in quite a prompt fashion, not only out of respect for them as a parent, but also so they know first-hand what is going on with their child. The literature review describes many instances in which those involved in a crisis have chosen to communicate through social media or other web avenues, sharing with family and friends that they are safe. This same sort of idea was apparent in the study of South Washington County Schools employees, as they admitted to either seeing students using their cell phones during crisis situations or other employees sharing information through social media, phones or text messaging. Although those involved may just be sharing their safety with others, facts or rumors about the situation spread like wildfire, and many

times to audiences not yet informed by school district personnel. As a result, publics are expecting information faster than ever before.

All in all this research has shown that social media has changed and continues to change the landscape of crisis communication. However, the same procedures and protocols still apply when dealing with these situations as learned from communications personnel and experts: anticipate the unexpected, institute (and practice) a crisis communications plan, train employees, have one spokesperson, have a backup spokesperson and finally, do not speculate. Parents, students and community members will always remember how a school district dealt with a crisis situation. As a communicator it is vital to make such an experience as positive as possible, the organization's reputation is depending on it.

Introduction

Social media has become a prevalent communication medium in today's society. Most organizations, businesses and non-profits are joining the phenomenon. Although such sites were originally intended for personal sharing, they have become a way to inform and market as well. That National School Public Relations Association (NSPRA) and its Minnesota Chapter (MinnSPRA) have held several educational sessions on how communications personnel can get started with and maintain this emerging medium in their school districts. As these organizations expose themselves to a worldwide two-way conversation, what happens when a crisis erupts? Will their reactions be proactive or reactive and why?

According to Center et al. (2008) the four types of crises are: acts of god; mechanical problems; human error; and management decisions, actions or inactions. At school districts

this can be anything from winter weather causing class delays to a gunman firing into school buildings. As uncertainty is heightened, receiving accurate information is key in reducing stress, anger and other emotions associated with such an experience. Social media is not only becoming an outlet to receive such accurate information, but is also quite timely (Palen et al., 2009). The Pew Internet Research Center defines social media as “an umbrella term that is used to refer to a new era of web-enabled applications that are built around user generated or user manipulated content, such as wikis, blogs, podcasts, and social networking sites” (Pew Internet and American Life, 2010). The Nielsen Company reported that the average unique visitors per month for Facebook in 2011 were 137,000,000 just short of Google’s top spot of 153,000,000 unique visitors. YouTube wasn’t following far behind with just over 106 unique visitors.

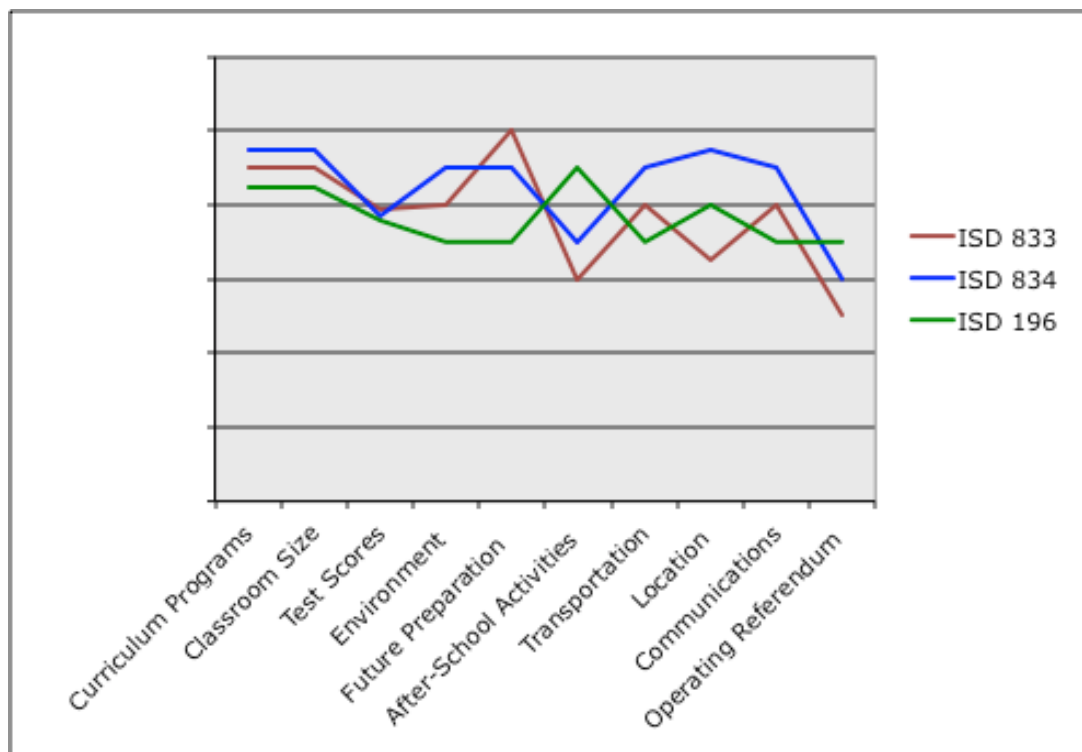
This following study focuses on South Washington County Schools, a district encompassing Twin Cities’ southeastern suburbs of Woodbury and Cottage Grove, and their communities. Last fall, the school district introduced Facebook, Twitter and YouTube sites to staff, students, parents and community members. The organization has just begun incorporating social media into its crisis communication plans as a result. Administrators plan to have further discussions as to social media’s role in communicating during such trying times. The district is wondering about the likelihood of participation amongst families with the increased offerings in communication venues. The author, also a part of the organization, has worked in the district’s communications department for over two years strategizing for both social media and crisis communication efforts. Over the last few years the school district has seen a variety of their publics participate more and more in social media including staff, parents and students. It is

important for this school district to learn more about social media and crisis communications to not only communicate more effectively with their stakeholders, but also to maintain its positive reputation in sharing timely, clear and accurate messages. Such effective communication could even help lessen the impact of a crisis.

Research Question: How can crisis communications be improved to successfully meet the expectations of the district's publics?

Neighboring districts of South Washington County Schools (District 833) include Stillwater Area Public Schools (District 834) and Rosemount, Apple Valley and Eagan (District 196). Both of these school districts are quite comparable in size and educational programs. The strategy canvas below gives an idea of where each compares.

Strategy canvas of Minnesota school districts 833, 834 and 196



Each of these school districts is doing fairly well communications-wise. They have a variety of venues available to their stakeholders, including social media sites. Just over a year ago,

Stillwater Area Public Schools held a public competition with Mounds View Area Schools to see which district could get the most Facebook fans. The story was publicized by local newspapers and turned out to be quite successful. Even though Stillwater may have won the competition, Mounds View still felt that they reaped a great amount of benefits.

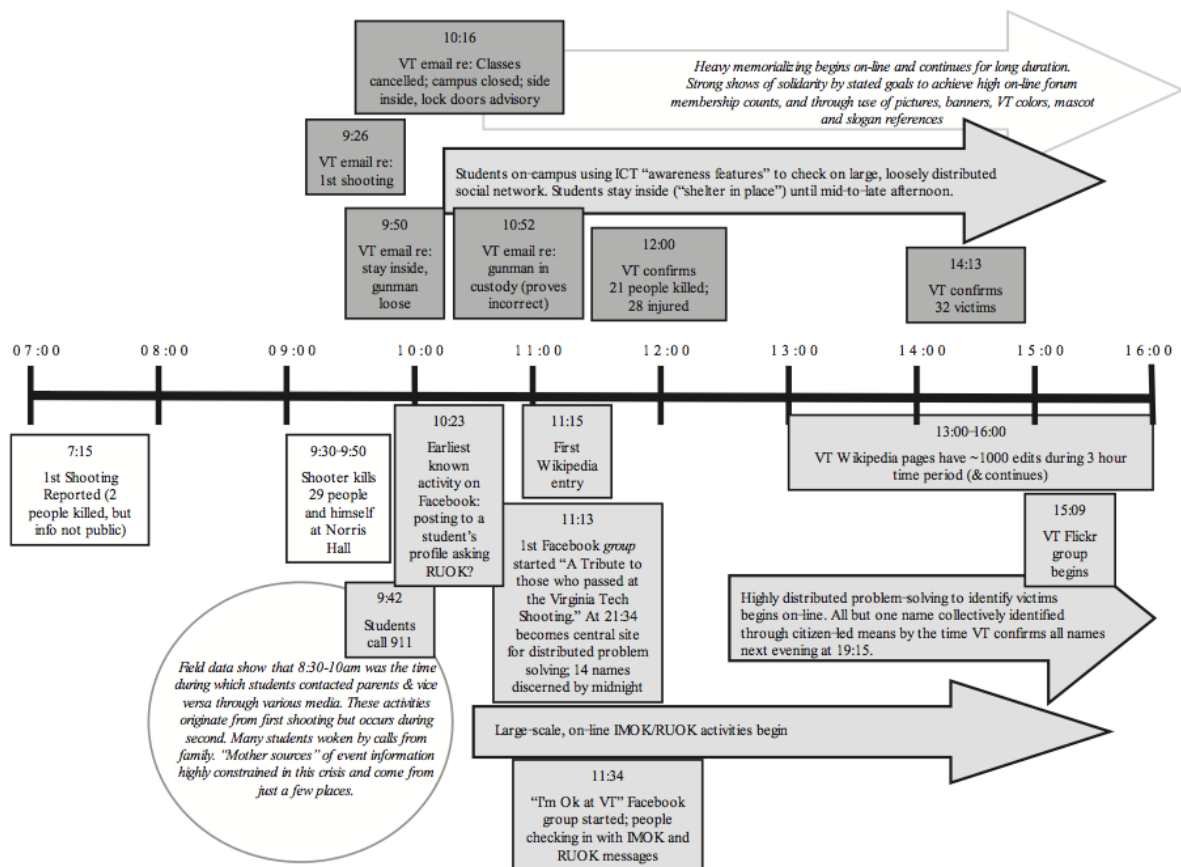
Literature Review

Uses and Gratifications

In the last two decades the Internet has become a wide source of information at home, work and school. Its users have proven it to be timely and interactive in many instances, as social media has followed in the last couple of years. Palen et al. (2009), examined social media use during and after the Virginia Tech shootings. CNN.com noted in one of the first reports of the attack that journalism students gathered in a classroom were writing about unfolding details of the event online. Through a variety of interviews (one-on-one, small and classroom groups) conducted just days after the tragedy, researchers discussed with publics how they were first made aware of the shootings, what they did when they were cognizant and how they stayed updated. It was determined through this research that Facebook, Flickr, Wikipedia, MySpace and other social media outlets were what many students, families and community members used to confirm whether or not their friends or relatives were victims of the massacre by sending “R U OK” or “I M OK” messages. In fact, an accurate list of victims was shared through such Internet technologies before the University released an official communication the following day: “Applications like Facebook, Flickr, MySpace, and messaging services like Twitter – serve as a new means for disaster survivors, curious onlookers, and compassionate helpers to find information and to assist others,” (Palen et al., 2009; Page 2). A timeline was

created to depict both official and unofficial communications regarding the event. At 7:15 a.m. the first shooting occurred. Two people were killed, but the information did not go public. At 9:30 a.m. a second shooting took place, which killed 29 students. Students called 911 at 9:42 a.m. University e-mails at 9:26 a.m. and 9:50 a.m. share with students and staff about the first shooting, recommending that everyone stay inside with possible gunmen on the loose. The first university social media post was at 10:15 a.m., just 3 hours after the first shooting and under an hour from the university's first official communication, "In today's networked world, members of the public increasingly rely on peer-distributed information, often finding it to be more timely and accurate," (Palen et al., 2009; Page 2).

Online and campus activities the first nine hours of the Virginia Tech incident



People are able to choose between several types of communication venues today. Just as in the Virginia Tech tragedy, people tend to choose a medium that best fits their needs, as described in the uses and gratifications theory. According to Katz et al. (1974), five needs are fulfilled by the media: cognitive (acquiring information, knowledge and understanding), affective (emotion, pleasure, feelings), personal integrative (credibility, stability, status), social integrative (family and friends) and tension release (escape and diversion). Essentially the audience is gratified most by the medium they choose. According to Blumler, McQuail and Brown (1972) there are four primary uses of media: diversion; personal relationships; personal identity or individual psychology; and surveillance. For example, people who use Facebook could be doing so for one of four reasons: one, to escape from the routine; two, to substitute for companionship; three, to reinforce their identity; or four, to find information that might affect them or help accomplish something.

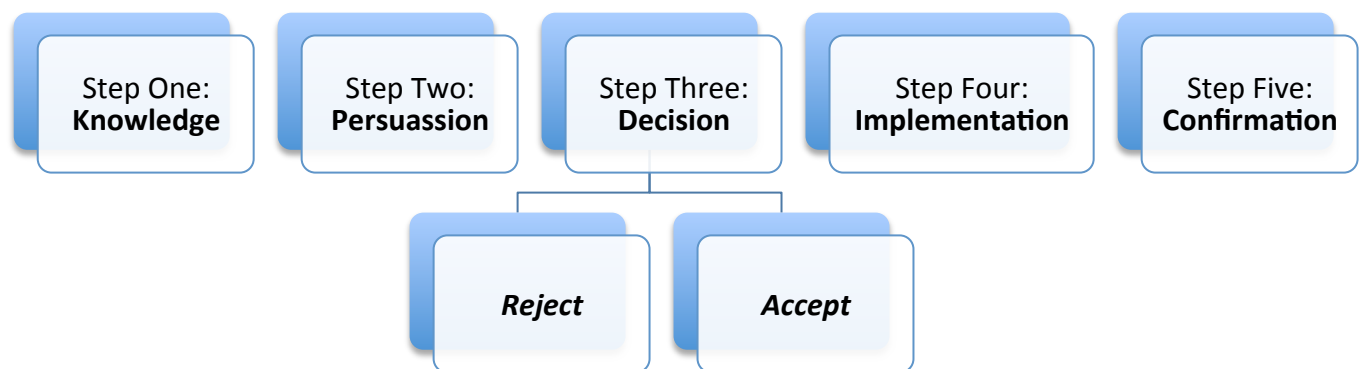
Azi Lev-on (2012) discusses in his article about community members in Israel who were dispersed throughout the country against their will. To create a sense of community during this crisis, victims relied heavily on the Internet to meet their cognitive, social and political needs. Lev-on discovered this by asking dispersed community members their media usage habits and how these channel(s) met such needs. Lev-on found similar linkages with Hurricane Katrina and the recent California wildfire crises. People were using social media to find information, communicate and help others, "the internet's importance lies not only in supporting hierarchical and 'top-down' information transmission, but mainly in providing opportunities for individuals and groups to organize and participate in collective action, and address their local needs," (Lev-on, 2012; Page 101).

Diffusion of Innovations

Being both timely and accurate in any organizational crisis is key. As discussed earlier, the Internet has changed the way organizations share information to their publics, “Online communication is an innovation that is diffusing to various types and sizes of organizations. It will influence how organizations will communicate with the media and publics,” (Taylor et al., 2005; Page 209). It has taken time for publics to adapt to this technology at every organization. Taylor et al. (2005) conducted a study on Internet usage with organizations experiencing a crisis situation. To determine the study participants, the researchers monitored MSNBC.com and CNN.com for a specified time period, ending up with a total of 92 organizational crises to focus on. Their research determined that organizations communicating through the Internet, used a traditional communication tactic as well, “Overwhelmingly, when organizations decide to integrate the Internet into their crisis response, they are adopting the traditional tactics. In total, 98% of the organizations that responded adopted at least one traditional media tactic while 34% of those that responded relied exclusively on the traditional media tactics for communicating about the crisis,” (Taylor et al., 2005; Page 212). These traditional tactics Taylor et al. (2005) have referred to include press releases, fact sheets, letters, memos, news conference as well as, questions and answers. Over the last decade both the internal and external publics of organizations across the world have been adapting to the Internet, “The use of new media tactics appears to be increasing. The data suggest that three of the five new media tactics—two-way communication (interaction between the public and the organization where the public is given the opportunity to respond), connecting links (links to web pages that offer a differing point of view, thereby better informing publics of the full context of the crisis),

and multimedia effects (use of new media vehicles)—show similar rates of adoption ranging from 34 to 46%,” (Taylor et al., 2005; Page 214).

As described in Rogers’ diffusion of innovation theory, people adapt to technology at different levels. As such, for any innovation there are innovators, early adopters, early majority, late majority and laggards. Five qualities determine the success of an innovation: relative advantage; compatibility with existing values and practices; simplicity and ease of use; trialability; and observable results (Ismail Sahin, 2006). In essence this theory groups people in specified categories, explaining their comfort level with technology. People go through five



stages in the decision innovation as the diagram below shows: knowledge, persuasion, decision, implementation and confirmation. The time level at each of these stages varies from person to person.

Parents in a School Communicators group, officiated by South Washington County Schools, recently interviewed representatives from district schools in regards to a variety of topics surrounding communication efforts. E-mails, phone calls, newsletters, the district’s websites and phone calls seemed to be the most common ways to share information with parents and community members. However, a handful of schools included their social media sites as a key

communication tool. Adequate Internet access was the largest reason staff members shared for not being able to update families through such means. This was a very small population of the students compared to five years ago, suggesting that the majority of families in the school district have adapted to Internet technology.

Social media expert Josh Dahmes, of Risdall Advertising in New Brighton, Minn., presented to the MinnSPRA group this spring. He shared many ways school communicators can utilize social media the best. Establishing specific, measurable, attainable, relevant and timely goals were Dahmes' greatest suggestion. This way, he said, an organization's social media site will be a place that people will trust visiting for timely, accurate information. He shared a recent incident in which a district was hacked by a student that created a mock site of a school's Facebook page and said that classes were cancelled due to snow. It created great chaos as many students and parents were confused by the message.

As the literature has shown, information is researching greater populations in our connected world, challenging organizations, including school districts, to be the first to share the information to their publics. Also as social media sites, such as Facebook, have seen high unique visitors, it is plain to see that publics are accessing information differently than in years past. To further understand South Washington County School's social media use during crisis situations, the following hypotheses are proposed:

H1: Social media is significantly increasing the speed at which employees are required to share crisis information to publics.

H2: Following South Washington County School's website and e-mail venues, social media is the preferred source for receiving information during a crisis situation at the district.

Methodology

Four different stakeholder groups (administrators, parents with district students, employees with district students and a crisis expert) were studied at South Washington County Schools to determine whether the hypotheses were supported or not supported. This included two online surveys, three interviews and a direct observation. Respondents for each were determined through a snowballing method. The author personally knew an employee leading a parent group and asked her to send out a survey to those people. The author also personally asked each school's office coordinator to share employees that had students attending district schools. A message was shared to ask for their participation by the researcher. All the research conducted was primary in that the author gathered information from her own fieldwork. To inspire participation amongst all groups it was shared with participants that the results would be presented to district administration and communications personnel to improve or maintain current strategies.

The employee group with students attending South Washington County Schools were asked questions in an online survey talking about social media and crisis communications (full questionnaire is included in Appendix 1) from Wednesday, April 11 through Friday, April 20, 2012. Respondents of this group included staff at all levels including teachers/paraprofessionals, support staff and administrators. A group of parents (non-

employees) were asked similar questions in an online survey (full questionnaire is included in Appendix 2) from Wednesday, April 11 through Friday, April 20, 2012. Respondents of this group included parents with students at varying education levels from kindergarten through 12th grade. For both surveys, the online tool, Survey Monkey was used. It took respondents about five minutes to complete as both contained fewer than 15 questions. To avoid bias, any questions that contained non-numerical responses, the online software reshuffled the answers for each new respondent.

Survey questions spanned a variety of topics including social media sites used, preferred channels, how one might respond in a crisis, acceptable timeframes, how one might rate past crises and technology used. The employee survey listed out 11 different channels and the parent (non-employee) survey listed out 10 they included: district website, district and/or school listserv (eNews), employee e-mail (employee survey only), Facebook, Twitter, Google Plus, phone call, text message, call-in number, television, radio and media websites. All channels are currently in use at the district in some fashion except for Google Plus, text messaging and radio. (A note, phone calls can be done manually or through automation.)

More generalized questions from the surveys were asked of an anonymous mother (non-employee) in an interview format on May 2nd. The parent currently has two students at the high school level. The mother and her two students are currently participating on social media sites. A full listing of the questions asked in this interview can be found in Appendix 4.

An interview was conducted with a female administrator in charge of creating communications at the school district (questions asked are included in Appendix 3) on Friday, April 20, 2012. The advantage of conducting this type of research was the depth of the results.

The researcher was able to spend an hour talking about the subject matter with the participant. It also seemed more convenient for the respondent to answer in this form. Interviewees tend to answer questions more honestly and openly than in a group setting. Also, more probing questions can be asked, depending on how the discussion goes. This same method was used with a mother, age 43, of two Woodbury High School students (questions asked are included in Appendix 4) on Wednesday, May 2, 2012. A final interview was then conducted with crisis expert, Mr. James Lukaszewski to gather a greater understanding of how social media is impacting organizations across the country, including school districts (questions asked are included in Appendix 5) on Friday, May 4, 2012.

The author, Communications Specialist at South Washington County Schools, conducted a direct observation for a crisis that began on Thursday, April 19, 2012 in regard to a former student's death. She addressed the details surrounding the situation, as well as the response from staff, parents, students and media. Included in the documentation is the effect social media had on the organization during this crisis (Appendix 11 details the recording).

Findings

Results from employee and non-employee surveys

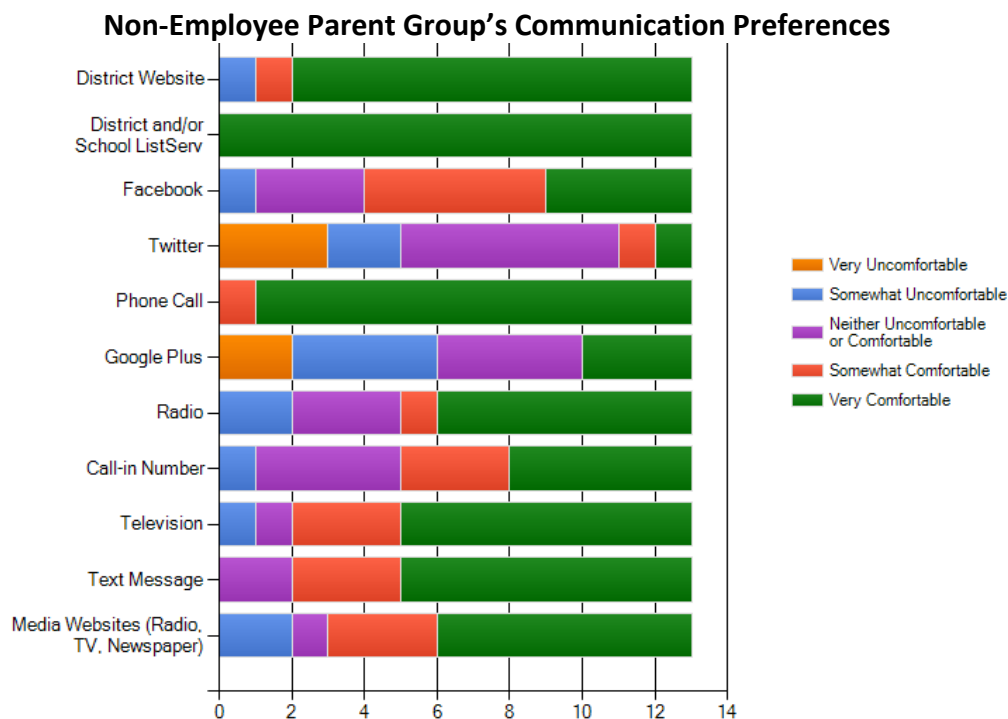
For online surveys, in the employee parent group there were 32 (N=32) respondents with 16 of those being teachers, followed by administration at 9 and support staff at 7, which was a 30% response rate. The non-employee parent group had 13 (N=13), which was a 52% response rate. Respondents spanned a variety of grade levels in which their children attended. Grade 11 was

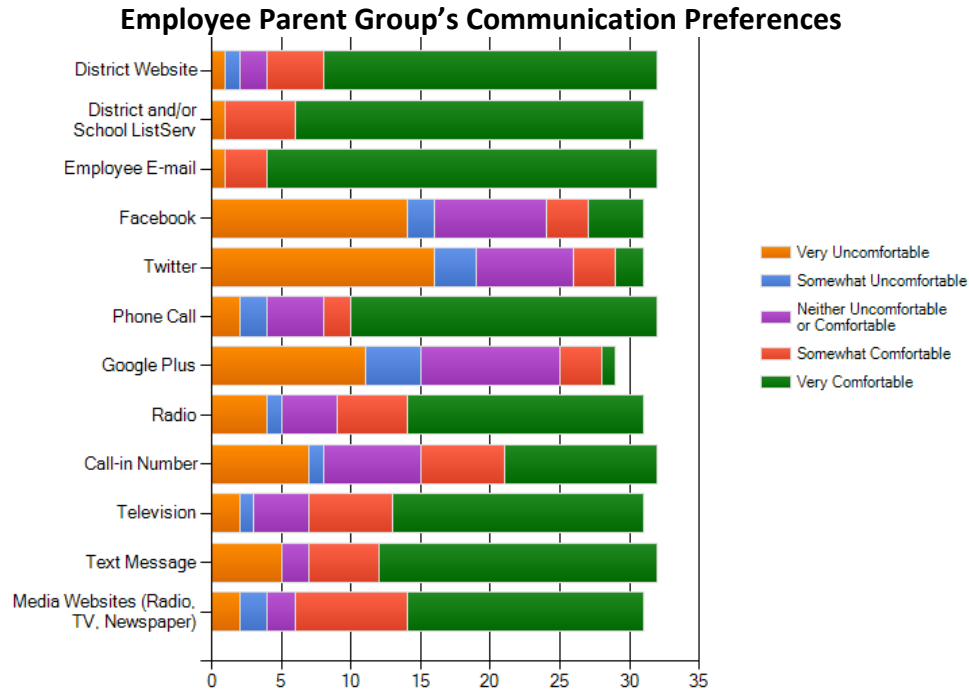
the highest group with 5 respondents choosing this category. For both surveys, the majority of respondents were in the age group 36-45.

In the non-employee group, about half of the respondents reported that social media has not changed the way they communicate with the district in any sort of fashion. For those that were using the tool, they mostly saw it as a positive experience, “I like my children’s school and the district on Facebook, so that I can get updates.” A few also noted that it wasn’t the primary way for them to receive information, but an additional route for quick updates. As social media continues to expand at South Washington County Schools, most were not sure as to how social media should be incorporated at the district. Those that were wishing to see more wanted information on specific subject areas such as the school board, legislature decisions, etc. In the employee parent group most of the respondents said that social media hasn’t changed the way that they communicate with their child’s school, again those that were using it thought the experience has been positive though, “I think it is a lot easier to communicate with my student’s school through social media. It seems to be more timely as well.”

Both surveys found that Facebook was overwhelmingly the choice for social media users whether for personal or work related reasons in both the employee parent group and the non-employee parent group. Interestingly the employee parent group was very uncomfortable in receiving crisis information via social media whether it was Facebook, Twitter or Google Plus. The non-employee parent group was neither comfortable or uncomfortable with using Twitter or Google Plus and were somewhat comfortable using Facebook as a source for crisis information. For the remaining channels in both instances the majority of respondents felt very comfortable with receiving information in somewhat traditional fashions (ie. phone call,

television, e-mail). The radio, call-in number and text message routes were a part of the “very comfortable” grouping, however, South Washington County Schools currently does not offer these resources as a way to share information. The top three venues for non-employee parents of the 11 rated were: district/school listserv (e-mail) and phone call were tied, followed by text message, then Facebook. Of the 12 media outlets rated by the employee parent group, the top three were: phone call and text message tied, followed by employee e-mail then the district website. Social media venues for particular group were in the very last spots. (The first graph shows the non-employee parent group, the second shows the employee parent group.)





If a crisis were more severe, both groups felt that 16-30 minutes was an appropriate timeframe to hear from their child's school or the district. If either group posted to a social media site about a smaller crisis situation, they would expect to receive an answer within 31-60 minutes.

In a question asked specifically to the employee parent group, alarmingly, a large number of respondents thought that it was ok to share information about a crisis situation with parents, family and/or friends. Of this same group, two respondents thought it was also ok to post about such a situation to a social media site. Although the majority of the respondents thought that no such sharing would be ok, that wasn't quite half of the group (43.8%). For non-employee parent group, over 50% of the respondents knew someone who had updated another parent by phone, e-mail or text; or e-mailed, called or texted family or friends about the situation. Of these same respondents, 23% have known someone to post about a school crisis on social media. And 46% have received notification of a situation before any school or district

communication. Another shocking figure, the majority of respondents in the employee group felt that they would allow a student using their cell phone during a crisis situation to continue doing so, even though rules at many schools prohibit them from interacting with such devices in the classroom.

For most crisis situations in the non-employee parent group, five respondents felt somewhat informed, but not falling very short of the four respondents who felt that they have been somewhat uninformed during prior crises. The employee parent group was tied for both somewhat informed and somewhat uninformed in this category. Both groups rated the school district “average” on clarity, transparency, accuracy, timeliness, patience and empathy in crisis situations. The same number of respondents chose the “above average” rating in the non-employee parent group for accuracy, patience and empathy. The smartphone seemed to be the technology device most used to receive crisis information for the employee parent group. The non-employee parent group was tied with both smartphone and work/home computer.

Interview responses from district parent (non-employee)

The response from the high school parent overwhelmingly shared that hearing something from the school or district is better than nothing at all. Silence is what really has harmed the organization in past crises. The mother named a few incidents including an increased presence of police officers, with no word from school administration; and a student death that was shared over social media before she heard from school or district personnel. This mother likes what she sees on the district’s social media sites, but would like to see more. However, she will continue to rely more on the district’s listserv (eNews) for accuracy and timeliness.

Interview responses from school administrator

The communications director interviewed believes social media has had a mostly positive impact on South Washington Schools in that a broader audience is now being reached.

However, the use of the new medium has increased the workload since traditional communication efforts still remain in place. This fall, a student death at a district high school was one of the first times such a crisis was shared by school personnel and then posted to the school's Facebook site. Community members, staff and students all responded positively to the post, by leaving encouraging and remembrance comments. The family affected also expressed their gratitude for communicating about the situation in this fashion, as many of the friends of the young student were a part of the social network. The school's crisis plan on cancelling or delaying school due to snow or other weather now includes posting such information to the district's social media sites. The school district has not used this method yet, as it has been over a year and a half since the last school closing.

For hot topic issues, more efforts are made on tracking social media discussions, "Communications has become a very large 'beast' and controlling it takes more than a two-person department some days." The time for sharing information to district publics varies on the severity of the crisis; typical is anywhere from 30 to 120 minutes. It is pertinent that internal audiences are notified first, then families and finally media. Being a large school district, the organization hasn't been successful when those employees directly involved do not communicate. Communications need to occur amongst each other, as well as administrators before sharing out information, so that the most accurate and concise message is shared. The communications department received a phone call from local media that a batting cage had

fallen during a sports practice. The journalist was asking whether or not students were injured during the incident. This was the first moment in which the department was informed as school personnel failed to inform the district about what had taken place. In this case it was necessary for communications to find out more before sharing information to media.

Curtailling students from using their cell phone during a crisis situation is nearly impossible. If students are using their cell phones in such situations, many times it is because they want to let their parents know they are ok. The communications director talked about an instance in which information spreads through the rumor mill even faster with technology. A message on a bathroom wall was misinterpreted earlier this school year, but students across campus were already aware of the misinformation. As a result, it turned into a crisis due to the spread of the message. The district's communications director believes future media outlets will be determined by the publics' needs, "The generations and their demand for communications will determine the direction."

Findings from Communication Specialist's direct observation

In the direct observation that was conducted by the district's communications specialist, the author saw an incident in which parents were informed prior to the school or district sharing information. A recent graduate of a district high school passed away as a result of injuries from a car accident. The only passenger riding in the vehicle was a current district high school student, who survived with non-life threatening injuries. Within hours of the incident both factual and erroneous information was being shared between district students regarding the death. The communications specialist received a message from a parent shortly after 10:30

p.m. that night saying a rumor of a student death was being shared on social media, seen through the eyes of her daughter's Facebook page. Having speculative information, this parent was looking for a formalized message from the school or district acknowledging the crisis. Washington County Public Safety did not inform the school district about the situation until the following morning. The parent inquiring did not receive official communication from the district until late morning the following day. By then, the details of the rumor had been filled through both social media networking and discussion with other parents.

Direct observation research from the district's Communication Specialist showed again that social media is a route for the school's publics to communicate. A district high school recently faced a crisis when a former student death was shared on social media before the district was even notified of the situation. Many of the rumors being shared were not factual. A parent knew about the incident via social media six hours after the incident (if not sooner), whereas district administration was officially notified thirteen hours afterwards.

Talking crisis with the communications expert

In talking with crisis communications expert, James E. Lukaszewski, although word may be getting out on social media before the district or school is able to share details, the "golden rule" still applies. The rule comes from wartime battlefield medicine and includes five steps: one, stop the production of victims; two, manage the victim dimension, three, communicate with key audiences and internally; four, notify those requiring notification; and five, deal with the self-appointed, self-anointed. Following these steps will not only improve the quality of the communications, but also the speed at which such information is shared. He also believes

communicators are focusing too much on tactics instead of objectives and strategies, as social media has shared.

Discussion

Information faster than ever before

As crises occur at South Washington County Schools it is vital that parents and guardians of affected students be notified first. The research conducted shows not only that stakeholders are expecting to receive information faster, but reiterates that they prefer to hear such information from the district instead of other people or venues. Social media has been noted as a key figure in the increase in this speed, supporting the first hypothesis. An employee parent said it best, “I expect information faster than ever before.” Many respondents noted instances in which they heard from others before the school district when a crisis situation had already occurred. As a result, communication plans need to be readdressed to curtail these occurrences. Publics are simply expecting to receive more and more information in a very timely fashion.

Social media not the key to staying informed

The majority of respondents in each of the online surveys shared that they weren’t readily using social media as a tool to stay informed about South Washington County Schools, therefore the second hypothesis was not supported. There may be several reasons for this finding including the short time span in which these sites have been shared with district publics, the continued adaptation of social media into everyday lives, the resistance in sharing such sensitive information via the web or the non-mobile version of district websites. Conducting

this same study in a few years time may conclude far different results. As shared earlier in the diffusion on innovations theory, it may also be that the district's publics are more in the "late majority" or "laggards" categories. According to Rogers these two groups account for 50% of the population.

Interestingly the employee parent group was very uncomfortable in receiving crisis information via social media whether it was Facebook, Twitter or Google Plus. The non-employee parent group was neither comfortable or uncomfortable with using Twitter or Google Plus and were somewhat comfortable using Facebook as a source for crisis information. A few reasons employees may feel like this is the sensitivity of the topics that may rise from crisis situations or they may know of the many privacy laws that apply to students and realize that not all crisis information can be shared through such websites. Parents, however, may not realize the restrictions that the district must adhere to or would rather be "in the know" instead of finding out about an incident far after it has already taken place or that anything can be done about it. A few months ago a school in the district was on a lockdown due to a disgruntled parent trying to gain access into the building. In this situation the district could not share the specific student involved, but ethically chose not to share the father's name either, as the student would be made out. Also, the subject of the feud was not shared publically.

Text messaging ranks high in medium choices

An insight discovered as a result of this survey, was that many of the school district's publics included text messaging as one of their top communication venues for receiving important information. Many public schools and institutions across the country use software vendors that

enable them to share communication through such a route. However, South Washington County Schools does not currently offer this as a way to communicate any sort of information. Investing in a new technology or service should be a topic of discussion with school district personnel in the near future or possibly with the vendor that the school district already has for automated phone messages. Many times the text message services are available with the automated phone message systems. Questions to ask such an organization might be, does your company have plans to expand their services to include text messaging? If so, is it in testing mode or when does your organization plan to roll it out? This also helps in beginning to address research question one, how can crisis communications be improved to successfully meet the expectation of the district's publics?

Sharing crisis information without consent

The fact that any respondents thought it was ok to share information about a crisis situation on their own (through social media or otherwise) without knowledge of a timeline or administration approval was disturbing, especially from the employee parent group. Being in such a large organization with several different buildings is a reality of the communications department at the school district though. It is these actions that will many times create an unsuccessful crisis communication effort at South Washington County Schools. The communications department needs to continue making a presence at schools across the district, so that when a crisis arrives employees feel comfortable in knowing a familiar person they can call for help. Although the most recent crisis response plans include information on contacting district administration and communications as well as the internal and external

publics that school administrators (principals, assistant principals) should communicate with; however, it doesn't specifically say do not share or post information about the incident. As the next version of crisis plan is in development, perhaps more direct verbiage regarding the sensitivity of information should be shared.

Mobile versions of district websites not on the project docket

Another research discovery that can be utilized in improving crisis communications at South Washington County Schools is the creation of mobile friendly websites. The smartphone is the technology device that most publics are readily receiving important communications from the school district, according to this study. If communications contain hyperlinks to a district or school website, users will continue to find full versions of the websites. This can be quite frustrating for people on the go trying to access important information. Many of the posts on school social media sites also refer users back to district websites, again hampering their efforts in receiving information quickly. This may be a result of the "average" rating on the timeliness category as well.

Developing an appropriate crisis communication plan

In conducting this research, an answer to the research question how best to communicate to school district publics has been found. The key is to share messages using a variety of both traditional and non-traditional methods in order to reach the greatest number of stakeholders. This ensures that communicators reach publics in a fashion that is most suitable to them. As shown herein, an organization should talk with its publics to determine which traditional and

non-traditional methods rise highest. It is pertinent to develop an appropriate communication plan after such research has been conducted and practice it regularly. Below is a sample of a communication plan for the cancellation of after-school activities and a student death:

Communication plan for cancellation of after-school activities

Research	Situation Analysis: Weather is causing school administration to cancel after-school activities. Communicators may learn about the decision as late as 2 p.m., leaving a mere hour to inform publics. Such a decision is determined by the Assistant Superintendents for Elementary and Secondary Education as well as high school Athletic Directors.	
	Goal: Inform publics prior to school letting out.	
Planning	Target Publics: Those affected by the decision including staff, parents (of students and Community Education's Kids Club) and local organizations renting school buildings/sites.	
	Objectives: Reach 100% of those affected (publics) with a concise, accurate message within 30 minutes of being informed.	
	Action Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Approve a template message with administration before an incident occurs. -Practice implementing the plan with team members. -Develop step-by-step directions for each tactic on or off-site. -Create a phone tree of important contacts including administration and communications personnel. Communication Strategies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Inform publics of the various channels they will find activity cancellation/school closing information before an incident occurs. 	
Implementation	Tactics: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Post a message on the district's Intranet site, SharePoint Broadcast a lower third on the district's cable channel Share an automated phone message Post a message on the district's website Share listserv (eNews) message at district and school level Post a message on the district's social media sites 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Communications Director Television Producer Student Information Communications Specialist Communications Specialist Communications Specialist
	Timeline: 30 minutes	
	Budget: Cost of automated phone program and staff time	
Evaluation	Measurement: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -Confirm that all e-mails and phone messages were sent properly and did not bounce back. -Gather the number of website views to the specific message. -Gather the number of social media views to the specific message. -Conduct a survey within days of the activity cancellation with staff, parents and involved community organizations to see if they had knowledge before school let out. 	
	Feedback and Program Adjustment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Share with administration in a written report whether or not the plan was a success. Document all steps of the process including pre-planning and implementation. Recommendations will be made if the timeline needs to improve. 	

Communication plan for student death

Research	Situation Analysis: A district high school student passed away unexpectedly. The family has given the school district the authority to share the news with students and staff.	
	Goal: Be the first to inform publics.	
Planning	Target Publics: Those affected by the news including students, staff and parents of affected students.	
	Objectives: Reach 100% of those affected (publics) with an accurate, empathetic message within 60 minutes of being informed.	
	Action Strategies: -Approve a template message with administration before an incident occurs. -Practice implementing the plan with team members. -Develop step-by-step directions for each tactic on or off-site. -Create a phone tree of important contacts including administration and communications personnel.	
	Communication Strategies: -Inform publics of the various channels they will find such information at the school before it occurs.	
Implementation	Tactics: Meet in person with students most directly affected (classroom or school) Post a message on the district's Intranet site, SharePoint Share an automated phone message Share listserv (eNews) message at district and school level Post a message on the district's social media sites	School Principal Communications Director Student Information Communications Specialist Communications Specialist
	Timeline: 60 minutes	
	Budget: Cost of automated phone program and staff time	
Evaluation	Measurement: -Confirm that all e-mails and phone messages were sent properly and did not bounce back. -Gather the number of social media views to the specific message. -Conduct a survey within days of the incident with staff, parents and involved community organizations to see if they had knowledge before other third-party sources.	
	Feedback and Program Adjustment: Share with administration in a written report whether or not the plan was successfully ran. Document all steps of the process including pre-planning and implementation. Recommendations will be made if the timeline needs to improve.	

Message example for cancellation of elementary and middle school activities alone:

After-school and evening activities for <date>

Due to current and predicted weather conditions, all elementary and middle school activities have been cancelled for this afternoon, <date>. Elementary and middle school activity buses have also been cancelled.

All high school after-school and evening activities will proceed as scheduled. This includes athletic events and student clubs. Community Education evening activities and Kids Club will take place as scheduled.

All students will be dismissed from school at their regularly scheduled times, though it is anticipated that buses will be running late on their routes.

Limitations of the research conducted

The low number of respondents for the non-employee parent survey signifies a weakness of this study. Also a greater representation needs to be from each school, grade level and employee group. A few challenges that hampered these efforts were the large number of surveys already being asked of stakeholders to complete, this was just one more to do. Also, the population of the employee parent group is also quite small, it is estimated by the human resources department that only about 300 of our 2,500 staff members are both employees of the school district and parents of students in the school district. Also, neither surveys were sanctioned as official district research, so it was not approved to be shared employee or community wide, mostly through word of mouth tactics with specific people or groups that were approved by district administration. This included one committee of 25 parents and 107 employees. This was the most professional and easiest way to gather data for this project, however, it may not be representative of the population. The best way to steer around this downfall would be to repeat the methodology shared herein with a greater research group. The advantages to such an online survey was that a population with easy access to technology, could quickly respond to the questions. However, using this medium could have be disadvantageous in that a population not preferring or unable to access Internet technologies was missing from the survey results. The disadvantage in conducting the two interviews was that the view held by the interviewee may not be the view held by the majority. Also, this form of research takes more time to complete.

Additional research opportunities

Further research needs to be conducted with the parents that are using social media and ways to attract the non-participating parent into social media to create a larger interactive audience. What are their reasons for choosing social media over other avenues? How does social media fulfill their needs over other channels? A similar study also needs to be conducted with folks that do not use social media and their reasons for choosing so. It may be beneficial to conduct a crisis communication survey immediately after the next crisis, asking questions specifically about that situation, how they found out about it and what they did once they knew (if anything). This would be similar to the Taylor et al. (2005) study, but focus more specifically on district identified tactics. Thoughts from respondents would be fresh in their mind, instead of asking them to remember a variety of past events. Being sensitive to parents and students, it would be more beneficial picking a topic such as a school closing, evacuation or severe weather instead of a student death, bomb threat or lockdown.

This research confirms a myriad of news articles around the country that shows social media may be a convenient source for school information, but many students are facing an entirely different experience on these social networking sites: bullying. Not only are social media sites becoming the “rumor mill” for school district information, but it is also having the same effect on students social lives. A small Minnesota town is now facing a social media craze as a young middle school student recently committed suicide because of bullying. Her father believes the culprit to blame in the situation is social media and text messaging as Boyd Huppert reports, “Text messaging and social media have made an already bad problem worse. Now the bully follows you home.” (Huppert, 2012) Although there isn’t much that the district can do about

these personal pages, principals and counselors need to realize that implications of the medium amongst their youngest public and share this with parents. Within the last year the communications department at the school district has been asked by school administration on what they should do in these situations. A small message has recently been crafted for principals to share with parents by the author:

*Dear Parent(s),
Social media web sites such as Facebook and Twitter are becoming very popular at <insert location>. In an effort to protect the safety of all our students, I would like to share some acceptable use standards established by our district. Cyber bullying will not be tolerated. Although social media can be a great tool for students to interact, many times postings of text or images by classmates hurt or embarrass others. Private profiles, groups or fan pages can prevent school and district personnel from discovering such cyber bullying incidents. If your child is participating with social media sites, I ask that you please closely monitor their interaction with others. Your help will create a positive environment for students in and out of the classroom. If you have any questions, please give me a call at <insert phone number>.*

Additional research also needs to be conducted on this avenue. The district is currently working on a school climate survey that may allude to some of these problems. It will get the ball rolling with the issue so to speak.

Noted in the message above and also by Lukaszewski himself, there is nothing that can be done to curtail the conversation amongst school district publics on their own sites, even if it is regarding an organization. It helps to be aware of any of these positive or negative discussions to not only better meet audience needs, but also learn of issues most publics are most concerned about. Many tools are available to monitor such online discussions. It would be helpful to conduct more research to the effectiveness of such tools, which ones organizations prefer and how best to react when negative posts are found. Such research would mostly focus on the communications personnel in charge of sharing messages or posting to the school district's social media sites.

Conclusion

Technology is continually changing. Communications professionals need to be familiar with such changes in order to understand what channels their audiences and stakeholders prefer. Even though a new technology venue may be added to a communication plan, it is important to keep a good mix between traditional and non-traditional communication methods to most successfully inform an organization's publics. The time in which communicators have to communicate is increasing because of this new technology, but it will not be the driving force in how information is shared. The "Golden Rule" still applies in crisis situations; however, additional training needs to take place in understand the importance of communications and its processes throughout organizations. With this, organizations will find a greater following amongst staff members, decreasing the likelihood of sensitive information spreading to local media.

As mentioned in the discussion, the following five conclusions are key:

- Social media is not the key to staying informed;
- Text messaging ranks high in medium choices;
- Sensitive crisis information is being shared without consent;
- Audiences are accessing via smartphones with non-mobile friendly sites; and
- Crisis communication plans need to be created and practiced.

All in all, having a great knowledge of an organization's audiences will help most in communicating to them and establishing as well as maintaining a positive reputation.

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APPENDIX 1

Online survey filled out by employees with children attending district schools.

Social Media's Impact on Crisis Communications at District 833

[Exit this survey](#)

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. You will not be asked to provide your name, your answers will simply be used to better understand social media's impact on South Washington County Schools' crisis communications. The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time!

*** 1. Which of the following social media sites do you use for personal and/or work use?
(Please select all that apply.)**

- ☐ Google Plus
- ☐ LinkedIn
- ☐ Twitter
- ☐ Facebook
- ☐ Flixster
- ☐ I do not use social media sites

Other (please specify)

*** 2. Please rate your comfort level for receiving information from the following venues during a crisis situation at the school district:**

	Very Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Neither Uncomfortable or Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Very Comfortable
Television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phone Call	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google Plus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text Message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District and/or School ListServ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee E-mail	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Radio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call-in Number	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 3. How would you like to receive crisis communications from the school district?**

Please rate the following venues 1 through 12, with 1 being your most preferred source (use each number only one time):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phone Call	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google Plus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District and/or School ListServ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Employee E-mail	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call-in Number	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text Message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 4. Your child's school is on lockdown because of a disgruntled stepparent. What do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?**

- ☐ 0-15 minutes
- ☐ 16-30 minutes
- ☐ 31-60 minutes
- ☐ 61-90 minutes
- ☐ 91-120 minutes
- ☐ After the situation took place

Other (please specify)

*** 5. You posted a comment on a district social media site inquiring about the cancellation of evening activities, what do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?**

- ☐ 0-15 minutes
- ☐ 16-30 minutes
- ☐ 31-60 minutes
- ☐ 61-90 minutes
- ☐ 91-120 minutes

Other (please specify)

*** 6. The district building you work in has just been evacuated due to a fire. After accounting for everyone, you see a student using his or her cell phone. What would you mostly likely do?**

- ☐ Let the student know that school policy prohibits students from using their cell phone
- ☐ Let the student continue to use his/her phone
- ☐ Let an administrator know that you saw a student using his/her cell phone

*** 7. In the midst of a crisis situation at South Washington County Schools, do you think it would be okay to (please check all that apply):**

- ☐ Post about the situation to a social media site
- ☐ Update a parent inquiring about the situation by e-mail, phone or text
- ☐ E-mail, call or text family or friends about the situation
- ☐ None of the above

*** 8. For crisis scenarios that have already occurred at your child's school, how well informed do you feel you have been in these situations?**

- ☐ Uninformed
- ☐ Somewhat uninformed
- ☐ Neither uninformed or informed
- ☐ Somewhat informed
- ☐ Informed

*** 9. Rate South Washington County Schools on the following characteristics for any crisis situation:**

	Extremely Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Clarity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transparency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accuracy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Timeliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Patience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 10. What device would you most likely use to receive or access an important message from school?**

- ☐ Tablet (iPad, Kindle Fire, etc.)
- ☐ Work or home computer
- ☐ Smartphone (iPhone, Android, etc.)

Other (please specify)

*** 11. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your child's school and the district.**

*** 12. Describe how you would like or not like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.**

*** 13. What category does your position fall into:**

- ☐ Teachers/educators/paraprofessionals

☐ Administration

☐ Support staff

Other (please specify)

*** 14. What is your current age:**

☐ 18-25

☐ 26-35

☐ 36-45

☐ 46-55

☐ 56-65

☐ 66+

Done

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Create your own [free online survey](#) now!

APPENDIX 2

Online survey filled out by parents whose children attend district schools (non-employees).

Social Media's Impact on Crisis Communications at District 833

[Exit this survey](#)

Please answer the following questions to the best of your ability. You will not be asked to provide your name, your answers will simply be used to better understand social media's impact on South Washington County Schools' crisis communications. The survey should take about 5 minutes to complete. Thank you for your time!

*** 1. Which of the following social media sites do you use for personal and/or work use?
(Please select all that apply.)**

☐ Google Plus

☐ Flixster

☐ Facebook

☐ Twitter

☐ LinkedIn

☐ I do not use social media sites

Other (please specify)

*** 2. Please rate your comfort level for receiving information from the following venues during a crisis situation at the school district:**

	Very Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Neither Uncomfortable or Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Very Comfortable
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text Message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District and/or School ListServ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call-in Number	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google Plus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phone Call	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 3. How would you like to receive crisis communications from the school district?**

Please rate the following venues 1 through 11, with 1 being your most preferred source (use each number only one time):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11
District and/or School ListServ	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Twitter	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Radio	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Phone Call	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Call-in Number	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
District Website	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Text Message	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Google Plus	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Television	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Facebook	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 4. Your child's school is on lockdown because of a disgruntled stepparent. What do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?**

- ☐ 0-15 minutes
- ☐ 16-30 minutes
- ☐ 31-60 minutes
- ☐ 61-90 minutes
- ☐ 91-120 minutes
- ☐ After the situation takes place

Other (please specify)

*** 5. You posted a comment on a district social media site inquiring about the cancellation of evening activities, what do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?**

- ☐ 0-15 minutes
- ☐ 16-30 minutes
- ☐ 31-60 minutes
- ☐ 61-90 minutes
- ☐ 91-120 minutes

Other (please specify)

*** 6. In the midst of a crisis situation at South Washington County Schools, do you know a parent who has (please check all that apply):**

- ☐ Updated another parent inquiring about the situation by e-mail, phone or text
- ☐ E-mailed, called or texted family or friends about the situation
- ☐ Received notification of a situation before any school or district communication
- ☐ Posted about the situation to a social media site
- ☐ None of the above

*** 7. For crisis scenarios that have already occurred at your child's school, how well informed do you feel you have been in these situations?**

- ☐ Uninformed
- ☐ Somewhat uninformed
- ☐ Neither uninformed or informed
- ☐ Somewhat informed
- ☐ Informed

*** 8. Rate South Washington County Schools on the following characteristics for any crisis situation:**

	Extremely Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent
Clarity	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Transparency	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Accuracy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

Timeliness	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Patience	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>
Empathy	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>	<input type="radio"/>

*** 9. What device would you most likely use to receive or access an important message from school?**

- ☐ Smartphone (iPhone, Android, etc.)
- ☐ Work or home computer
- ☐ Tablet (iPad, Kindle Fire, etc.)

Other (please specify)

*** 10. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your child's school and the district.**

*** 11. Describe how you would like or not like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.**

*** 12. What grade level is your child in (please select all that apply):**

- ☐ Early Childhood
- ☐ Kindergarten
- ☐ 1st Grade
- ☐ 2nd Grade
- ☐ 3rd Grade
- ☐ 4th Grade
- ☐ 5th Grade
- ☐ 6th Grade
- ☐ 7th Grade

- ☐ 8th Grade
- ☐ 9th Grade
- ☐ 10th Grade
- ☐ 11th Grade
- ☐ 12th Grade

*** 13. What is your current age:**

- ☐ 18-25
- ☐ 26-35
- ☐ 36-45
- ☐ 46-55
- ☐ 56-65
- ☐ 66+

Done

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APPENDIX 3

Questionnaire to employees in charge of creating communications

1. What are both the positive and negative effects social media has had at your school district?
2. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your publics?
3. What tools are being used at South Washington County Schools to communicate during a crisis situation?
4. A crisis situation causes a staff/student evacuation from one of your schools. What timeframe do you believe would be appropriate to notify your publics? Have you or would you consider using social media as a medium to share information?
5. How often does staff, students or community member's participation on social media sites further ignite a crisis situation? Explain with an example if possible.
6. Does your school district track social media discussions about the organization, outside of its sites? If so, how often and what tools are used?
7. Describe how you would like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.
8. How do you see social media shaping the future of school communications?
9. Many staff and students have cell phones. During a crisis communication they may be communicating with external publics before the district has had a chance to share information. What steps are being taken to possibly curtail this? Please share any experiences.
10. Clarity, transparency, accuracy, timeliness, patience and empathy are characteristics communicators strive for during any crisis situation. Explain how South Washington County Schools has either been successful or unsuccessful in achieving these.

APPENDIX 4

Questionnaire to parents of South Washington County Schools' students(s)

1. When your school faces a crisis situation (fire, weather closure, etc.) how do you find out details and stay updated?
2. How often are you informed by sources other than the school district? Explain.
3. Is there anything about the district's crisis communication process that you think could be improved and how?
4. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you stay informed.
5. How has South Washington County Schools positively used social media?
6. How has South Washington County Schools negatively use social media?
7. How would you like to see social media being used at South Washington County Schools?
8. How often does participation on social media sites further ignite a crisis situation at South Washington County Schools whether it's other parents, students or community members?
9. How do you see social media shaping future district communications?
10. Clarity, transparency, accuracy, timeliness, patience and empathy are characteristics communicators strive for during any crisis situation. Explain how South Washington County Schools has either been successful or unsuccessful in achieving these.

APPENDIX 5

Questionnaire to crisis communications experts

1. Explain how you believe social media has or hasn't changed the way organizations communicate with their publics?
2. What do you believe are both the positive and negative effects social media has had on crisis communications?
3. The timeframe publics are expecting to receive information is decreasing, how would you recommend that organizations "stay ahead of the curve" so to speak?
4. In many cases, publics are finding out about crisis situations through the rumor mill. How might you suggest this be curtailed?
5. Do you believe social media has taken the control of the conversation away from organizations?
6. In several of your publications you share that honesty and transparency are goals for any organizations facing crisis
7. You talk about stealth web sites in your article "The Crisis Web Site." Should a similar plan be implemented for the social media realm?
8. Describe how you would like to see social media being used at organizations, if at all.
9. How do you see social media shaping the future of school communications?

APPENDIX 6






Results for online survey filled out by parents whose children attend district schools (non-employees).

Conducted: Wednesday, April 11 through Friday, April 20

Social Media's Impact on Crisis Communications at District 833



1. Which of the following social media sites do you use for personal and/or work use?
(Please select all that apply.)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Facebook		92.3%	12
Twitter		15.4%	2
Google Plus		23.1%	3
LinkedIn		53.8%	7
Flixster		0.0%	0
I do not use social media sites		7.7%	1
Other (please specify)			1
answered question			13
skipped question			0

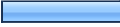



2. Please rate your comfort level for receiving information from the following venues during a crisis situation at the school district:

	Very Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Neither Uncomfortable or Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Rating Average	Response Count
District Website	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	84.6% (11)	4.69	13
District and/or School ListServ	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	100.0% (13)	5.00	13
Facebook	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	23.1% (3)	38.5% (5)	30.8% (4)	3.92	13
Twitter	23.1% (3)	15.4% (2)	46.2% (6)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	2.62	13
Phone Call	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	92.3% (12)	4.92	13
Google Plus	15.4% (2)	30.8% (4)	30.8% (4)	0.0% (0)	23.1% (3)	2.85	13
Radio	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	23.1% (3)	7.7% (1)	53.8% (7)	4.00	13
Call-in Number	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	30.8% (4)	23.1% (3)	38.5% (5)	3.92	13
Television	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	23.1% (3)	61.5% (8)	4.38	13
Text Message	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	23.1% (3)	61.5% (8)	4.46	13
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	7.7% (1)	23.1% (3)	53.8% (7)	4.15	13
answered question							13
skipped question							0






3. How would you like to receive crisis communications from the school district? Please rate the following venues 1 through 11, with 1 being your most preferred source (use each number only one time):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	Rating Average	Response Count
District Website	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	27.3% (3)	36.4% (4)	27.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	4.55	11
District and/or School ListServ	45.5% (5)	9.1% (1)	18.2% (2)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	3.09	11
Facebook	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	27.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	18.2% (2)	9.1% (1)	9.1% (1)	9.1% (1)	18.2% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	5.36	11
Twitter	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	20.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	40.0% (4)	40.0% (4)	9.60	10
Google Plus	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	20.0% (2)	0.0% (0)	10.0% (1)	40.0% (4)	30.0% (3)	9.60	10
Phone Call	30.8% (4)	23.1% (3)	23.1% (3)	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	7.7% (1)	3.38	13
Text Message	8.3% (1)	50.0% (6)	0.0% (0)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	8.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	8.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.67	12
Call-in Number	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	27.3% (3)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	27.3% (3)	0.0% (0)	18.2% (2)	7.27	11
Television	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	54.5% (6)	18.2% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	7.00	11
Radio	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.1% (1)	9.1% (1)	27.3% (3)	18.2% (2)	18.2% (2)	9.1% (1)	9.1% (1)	7.91	11
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	18.2% (2)	36.4% (4)	9.1% (1)	18.2% (2)	18.2% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	5.82	11
answered question													13
skipped question													0






4. Your child's school is on lockdown because of a disgruntled stepparent. What do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?

		Response Percent	Response Count
0-15 minutes		23.1%	3
16-30 minutes		46.2%	6
31-60 minutes		15.4%	2
61-90 minutes		0.0%	0
91-120 minutes		0.0%	0
After the situation takes place		15.4%	2
Other (please specify)			1
answered question			13
skipped question			0






5. You posted a comment on a district social media site inquiring about the cancellation of evening activities, what do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?

		Response Percent	Response Count
0-15 minutes		15.4%	2
16-30 minutes		15.4%	2
31-60 minutes		30.8%	4
61-90 minutes		23.1%	3
91-120 minutes		15.4%	2
Other (please specify)			2
answered question			13
skipped question			0

6. In the midst of a crisis situation at South Washington County Schools, do you know a parent who has (please check all that apply):

		Response Percent	Response Count
Updated another parent inquiring about the situation by e-mail, phone or text		53.8%	7
E-mailed, called or texted family or friends about the situation		53.8%	7
Posted about the situation to a social media site		23.1%	3
Received notification of a situation before any school or district communication		46.2%	6
None of the above		30.8%	4
answered question			13
skipped question			0




7. For crisis scenarios that have already occurred at your child's school, how well informed do you feel you have been in these situations?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Uninformed		7.7%	1
Somewhat uninformed		30.8%	4
Neither uninformed or informed		7.7%	1
Somewhat informed		38.5%	5
Informed		15.4%	2
answered question			13
skipped question			0

8. Rate South Washington County Schools on the following characteristics for any crisis situation:

	Extremely Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Rating Average	Response Count
Clarity	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	53.8% (7)	38.5% (5)	0.0% (0)	3.31	13
Transparency	7.7% (1)	0.0% (0)	69.2% (9)	23.1% (3)	0.0% (0)	3.08	13
Accuracy	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	46.2% (6)	46.2% (6)	7.7% (1)	3.62	13
Timeliness	0.0% (0)	23.1% (3)	46.2% (6)	30.8% (4)	0.0% (0)	3.08	13
Patience	0.0% (0)	7.7% (1)	46.2% (6)	46.2% (6)	0.0% (0)	3.38	13
Empathy	0.0% (0)	15.4% (2)	38.5% (5)	38.5% (5)	7.7% (1)	3.38	13
answered question							13
skipped question							0

9. What device would you most likely use to receive or access an important message from school?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Work or home computer		46.2%	6
Smartphone (iPhone, Android, etc.)		46.2%	6
Tablet (iPad, Kindle Fire, etc.)		7.7%	1
Other (please specify)			2
answered question			13
skipped question			0

10. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your child's school and the district.

**Response
Count**

13

answered question 13

skipped question 0

11. Describe how you would like or not like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.












**Response
Count**



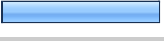
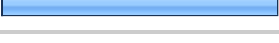

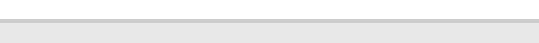
13

answered question 13

skipped question 0

12. What grade level is your child in (please select all that apply):

		Response Percent	Response Count
Early Childhood		15.4%	2
Kindergarten		15.4%	2
1st Grade		0.0%	0
2nd Grade		7.7%	1
3rd Grade		7.7%	1
4th Grade		0.0%	0
5th Grade		15.4%	2
6th Grade		15.4%	2
7th Grade		23.1%	3
8th Grade		0.0%	0
9th Grade		15.4%	2
10th Grade		7.7%	1
11th Grade		38.5%	5
12th Grade		23.1%	3
answered question			13
skipped question			0

13. What is your current age:			
		Response Percent	Response Count
18-25		0.0%	0
26-35		0.0%	0
36-45		30.8%	4
46-55		53.8%	7
56-65		15.4%	2
66+		0.0%	0
answered question			13
skipped question			0

Q1. Which of the following social media sites do you use for personal and/or work use? (Please select all that apply.)		
1	facebook and google very rarely	Apr 11, 2012 8:27 AM

Q4. Your child's school is on lockdown because of a disgruntled stepparent. What do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?		
1	Children safe first, and then immediately let us know of the lockdown.	Apr 11, 2012 9:18 AM

Q5. You posted a comment on a district social media site inquiring about the cancellation of evening activities, what do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?		
1	Depends on time of day. Closer to evening, quicker notification.	Apr 14, 2012 4:51 AM
2	Depends a little how close it is to the activities.	Apr 11, 2012 9:18 AM

Q9. What device would you most likely use to receive or access an important message from school?		
1	or my computer, whichever I was on at the time.	Apr 11, 2012 9:18 AM
2	or regular cell phone	Apr 11, 2012 8:27 AM

Q10. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your child's school and the district.		
1	I like my children's school and the district on facebook, so that I can get updates.	Apr 17, 2012 9:45 AM
2	Hasn't. Don't use social media as much as I do web sites (both district, school and resources) and listservs.	Apr 14, 2012 4:51 AM
3	I haven't used social media for this purpose	Apr 12, 2012 10:19 AM
4	I don't "communicate with the the school via social media outside of listserve	Apr 12, 2012 10:17 AM
5	Social Media hasn't changed how I communicate, just how I receive information. I believe communication is between at least 2 people talking!!!	Apr 12, 2012 4:53 AM
6	More immediate knowledge of student academic progress.	Apr 11, 2012 1:07 PM
7	n/a	Apr 11, 2012 11:25 AM
8	I like getting updates right away on the list serv. it would help if they were on our cell phones.	Apr 11, 2012 10:31 AM
9	Would love to be able to ask clarifying questions on a facebook page or email or blog, about most any school event, or something posted in announcements. Everything that gets sent out says, DON'T REPLY TO THIS MESSAGE, but it seldom includes alternate contact information when there are questions. A contact email for everything in announcements for followup questions would be great. If we could ask the questions in a social media setting rather than an email, then if other parents have the same question, they could just look in the comments and see that it has already been answered. I think it would be an overall timesaver for the schools.	Apr 11, 2012 9:18 AM
10	I rarely use it. I only use them for work.	Apr 11, 2012 8:32 AM
11	not a regular user of social media	Apr 11, 2012 8:27 AM
12	I see the Facebook messages reminding people of various events, but they all seem unimportant. They are reminders of PTA events and concerts.	Apr 11, 2012 8:22 AM
13	A few times a week I check on facebook for updates but I primarily use phone/email to instantly receive email updates.	Apr 11, 2012 8:14 AM

Q11. Describe how you would like or not like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.		
1	I don't expect social media to alert me that there is an issue at school. That needs to be done in a more timely manner. I can go days without checking social media.	Apr 17, 2012 9:45 AM
2	Choose one method (listservs, web site, etc.) and use that tool. Example. CGMS listserv includes a calendar of events. Weeks before the school dance information was posted to the web site but was not included in listserv communication when all other "important dates" were included. I don't want to have to check several places to ensure I am getting complete information. I want "one-stop shopping" or a link to get me to further information if it's a subject of interest to me or my child.	Apr 14, 2012 4:51 AM
3	Not sure	Apr 12, 2012 10:19 AM
4	n/a	Apr 12, 2012 10:17 AM
5	Not sure at this time.	Apr 12, 2012 4:53 AM
6	Don't be alarmist. I trust the schools to do what is right.	Apr 11, 2012 1:07 PM
7	More on Facebook	Apr 11, 2012 11:25 AM
8	I don't think a call-in number is a good idea.	Apr 11, 2012 10:31 AM
9	As an example, I would like to hear about a suicide from the school BEFORE I see it on facebook. I understand there are sensitivities to families involved you have to consider, but the problem is that a lot of misinformation circulates before we hear from the school. We should always hear from the district FIRST. I don't think social media is the only means of communication, but I do believe it to be a very important means that we are underutilizing. While the effort to launch it might be great, and someone has to take responsibility for each platform within a school, I think parents would be better informed.	Apr 11, 2012 9:18 AM
10	No much.	Apr 11, 2012 8:32 AM
11	not sure	Apr 11, 2012 8:27 AM
12	They should post school board minutes, legislature decisions, crisis information, similar to how Woodbury patch informs their readers.	Apr 11, 2012 8:22 AM
13	The more info the better directly from the schools. Students have sent texts/emails from the schools when something is going on and sometimes the info is not accurate and causes panic.	Apr 11, 2012 8:14 AM

APPENDIX 7






Results for online survey filled out by parents whose children attend district schools (non-employees).

Conducted: Wednesday, April 11 through Friday, April 20

Social Media's Impact on Crisis Communications at District 833



1. Which of the following social media sites do you use for personal and/or work use?
(Please select all that apply.)

		Response Percent	Response Count
Facebook		71.9%	23
Twitter		25.0%	8
Google Plus		9.4%	3
LinkedIn		25.0%	8
Flixster		0.0%	0
I do not use social media sites		21.9%	7
Other (please specify)			0
answered question			32
skipped question			0

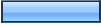




2. Please rate your comfort level for receiving information from the following venues during a crisis situation at the school district:

	Very Uncomfortable	Somewhat Uncomfortable	Neither Uncomfortable or Comfortable	Somewhat Comfortable	Very Comfortable	Rating Average	Response Count
District Website	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	6.3% (2)	12.5% (4)	75.0% (24)	4.53	32
District and/or School ListServ	3.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	16.1% (5)	80.6% (25)	4.71	31
Employee E-mail	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	9.4% (3)	87.5% (28)	4.78	32
Facebook	45.2% (14)	6.5% (2)	25.8% (8)	9.7% (3)	12.9% (4)	2.39	31
Twitter	51.6% (16)	9.7% (3)	22.6% (7)	9.7% (3)	6.5% (2)	2.10	31
Phone Call	6.3% (2)	6.3% (2)	12.5% (4)	6.3% (2)	68.8% (22)	4.25	32
Google Plus	37.9% (11)	13.8% (4)	34.5% (10)	10.3% (3)	3.4% (1)	2.28	29
Radio	12.9% (4)	3.2% (1)	12.9% (4)	16.1% (5)	54.8% (17)	3.97	31
Call-in Number	21.9% (7)	3.1% (1)	21.9% (7)	18.8% (6)	34.4% (11)	3.41	32
Television	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	12.9% (4)	19.4% (6)	58.1% (18)	4.19	31
Text Message	15.6% (5)	0.0% (0)	6.3% (2)	15.6% (5)	62.5% (20)	4.09	32
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	6.5% (2)	6.5% (2)	6.5% (2)	25.8% (8)	54.8% (17)	4.16	31
answered question							32
skipped question							0



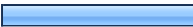


3. How would you like to receive crisis communications from the school district? Please rate the following venues 1 through 12, with 1 being your most preferred source (use each number only one time):

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10	11	12	Rating Average	Response Count
District Website	6.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	9.4% (3)	37.5% (12)	9.4% (3)	6.3% (2)	9.4% (3)	6.3% (2)	3.1% (1)	6.3% (2)	6.3% (2)	0.0% (0)	5.44	32
District and/or School ListServ	12.5% (4)	6.3% (2)	15.6% (5)	12.5% (4)	25.0% (8)	6.3% (2)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	6.3% (2)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	4.91	32
Employee E-mail	12.9% (4)	29.0% (9)	19.4% (6)	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.5% (2)	6.5% (2)	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	4.42	31
Facebook	3.3% (1)	6.7% (2)	3.3% (1)	0.0% (0)	3.3% (1)	13.3% (4)	16.7% (5)	10.0% (3)	3.3% (1)	23.3% (7)	6.7% (2)	10.0% (3)	7.77	30
Twitter	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	3.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.2% (1)	3.2% (1)	3.2% (1)	12.9% (4)	6.5% (2)	35.5% (11)	22.6% (7)	9.32	31
Google Plus	3.2% (1)	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	6.5% (2)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	3.2% (1)	16.1% (5)	19.4% (6)	29.0% (9)	8.87	31
Phone Call	19.4% (6)	16.1% (5)	16.1% (5)	3.2% (1)	9.7% (3)	3.2% (1)	3.2% (1)	9.7% (3)	3.2% (1)	6.5% (2)	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	4.84	31
Text Message	25.8% (8)	19.4% (6)	12.9% (4)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	6.5% (2)	6.5% (2)	3.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	12.9% (4)	4.65	31
Call-in Number	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.1% (1)	15.6% (5)	3.1% (1)	6.3% (2)	15.6% (5)	15.6% (5)	9.4% (3)	12.5% (4)	15.6% (5)	8.41	32
Television	3.2% (1)	0.0% (0)	12.9% (4)	3.2% (1)	6.5% (2)	29.0% (9)	22.6% (7)	6.5% (2)	9.7% (3)	6.5% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	6.23	31
Radio	0.0% (0)	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	12.5% (4)	15.6% (5)	3.1% (1)	15.6% (5)	12.5% (4)	18.8% (6)	15.6% (5)	3.1% (1)	0.0% (0)	7.22	32
Media Websites (Radio, TV, Newspaper)	6.7% (2)	6.7% (2)	3.3% (1)	6.7% (2)	13.3% (4)	16.7% (5)	13.3% (4)	23.3% (7)	6.7% (2)	0.0% (0)	0.0% (0)	3.3% (1)	6.03	30
answered question													32	
skipped question													0	


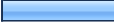

4. Your child's school is on lockdown because of a disgruntled stepparent. What do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?

		Response Percent	Response Count
0-15 minutes		18.8%	6
16-30 minutes		46.9%	15
31-60 minutes		12.5%	4
61-90 minutes		9.4%	3
91-120 minutes		0.0%	0
After the situation took place		12.5%	4
Other (please specify)			0
answered question			32
skipped question			0




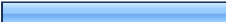
5. You posted a comment on a district social media site inquiring about the cancellation of evening activities, what do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?

		Response Percent	Response Count
0-15 minutes		18.8%	6
16-30 minutes		21.9%	7
31-60 minutes		37.5%	12
61-90 minutes		6.3%	2
91-120 minutes		15.6%	5
Other (please specify)			1
answered question			32
skipped question			0






6. The district building you work in has just been evacuated due to a fire. After accounting for everyone, you see a student using his or her cell phone. What would you mostly likely do?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Let the student know that school policy prohibits students from using their cell phone		34.4%	11
Let an administrator know that you saw a student using his/her cell phone		21.9%	7
Let the student continue to use his/her phone		43.8%	14
answered question			32
skipped question			0

7. In the midst of a crisis situation at South Washington County Schools, do you think it would be okay to (please check all that apply):

		Response Percent	Response Count
Update a parent inquiring about the situation by e-mail, phone or text		40.6%	13
E-mail, call or text family or friends about the situation		37.5%	12
Post about the situation to a social media site		9.4%	3
None of the above		43.8%	14
answered question			32
skipped question			0




8. For crisis scenarios that have already occurred at your child's school, how well informed do you feel you have been in these situations?

		Response Percent	Response Count
Uninformed		3.1%	1
Somewhat uninformed		28.1%	9
Neither uninformed or informed		18.8%	6
Somewhat informed		28.1%	9
Informed		25.0%	8
answered question			32
skipped question			0

9. Rate South Washington County Schools on the following characteristics for any crisis situation:

	Extremely Poor	Below Average	Average	Above Average	Excellent	Rating Average	Response Count
Clarity	3.1% (1)	12.5% (4)	46.9% (15)	28.1% (9)	9.4% (3)	3.28	32
Transparency	3.1% (1)	12.5% (4)	59.4% (19)	25.0% (8)	0.0% (0)	3.06	32
Accuracy	0.0% (0)	6.5% (2)	51.6% (16)	32.3% (10)	9.7% (3)	3.45	31
Timeliness	6.3% (2)	3.1% (1)	56.3% (18)	21.9% (7)	12.5% (4)	3.31	32
Patience	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	46.9% (15)	34.4% (11)	12.5% (4)	3.50	32
Empathy	3.1% (1)	3.1% (1)	46.9% (15)	25.0% (8)	21.9% (7)	3.59	32
answered question							32
skipped question							0

10. What device would you most likely use to receive or access an important message from school?




		Response Percent	Response Count
Work or home computer		40.6%	13
Smartphone (iPhone, Android, etc.)		56.3%	18
Tablet (iPad, Kindle Fire, etc.)		3.1%	1
Other (please specify)			1
answered question			32
skipped question			0




11. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your child's school and the district.

	Response Count
	32
answered question	32
skipped question	0

12. Describe how you would like or not like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.

	Response Count
	32
answered question	32
skipped question	0

13. What category does your position fall into:			
		Response Percent	Response Count
Teachers/educators/paraprofessionals		50.0%	16
Administration		28.1%	9
Support staff		21.9%	7
Other (please specify)			1
		answered question	32
		skipped question	0

14. What is your current age:			
		Response Percent	Response Count
18-25		0.0%	0
26-35		6.3%	2
36-45		59.4%	19
46-55		34.4%	11
56-65		0.0%	0
66+		0.0%	0
		answered question	32
		skipped question	0

Q5. You posted a comment on a district social media site inquiring about the cancellation of evening activities, what do you believe would be an acceptable timeframe to hear from the school or district?

1	It depends on when I posted, but would think within a couple hours of the activity	Apr 11, 2012 11:24 AM
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Q10. What device would you most likely use to receive or access an important message from school?

1	standard cell phone	Apr 18, 2012 7:29 AM
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Q11. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your child's school and the district.

1	I expect information faster than ever before.	Apr 22, 2012 7:26 AM
2	N/A	Apr 20, 2012 11:59 AM
3	No change	Apr 20, 2012 9:52 AM
4	I check the website for information that I need. It is also helpful to get the phone call when something important is coming up at school.	Apr 18, 2012 11:03 AM
5	has not	Apr 18, 2012 9:57 AM
6	I do not use facebook or social media sites so I would prefer phone call or texts.	Apr 18, 2012 9:21 AM
7	It has changed with more drama and behaviors coming into the school setting and also it has changed the way we communicate	Apr 18, 2012 9:11 AM
8	hasnt change since email became the easiest way of communication.	Apr 18, 2012 9:04 AM
9	Has not changed the way I communicate.	Apr 18, 2012 8:04 AM
10	I use facebook on a personal level, but have not used for other purposes. I sit at a computer most of the day and try to avoid screen time at other times.	Apr 18, 2012 7:40 AM
11	don't use social media to communicate with the school.	Apr 18, 2012 7:29 AM
12	It hasn't changed much as on many occasions the social media gets lost in the mass of personal communications.	Apr 18, 2012 6:17 AM
13	it hasn't	Apr 17, 2012 9:01 AM
14	Social media is not changing how I communicate, but it does provide information in another way. The use of messenger with Infinite Campus has actually had the biggest impact on keeping me informed on what I need to know related to my MS student. The MS are doing the best job of using that kind of communication.	Apr 16, 2012 12:55 PM
15	We get a lot more timely information via listserv or schoolconnects than we used to. Same message to many people at one time... It's GREAT!	Apr 16, 2012 11:43 AM
16	has not	Apr 16, 2012 11:39 AM
17	i use email more than ever.	Apr 16, 2012 9:56 AM
18	use like email	Apr 16, 2012 9:48 AM
19	I don't use social media at all. List serve is the only device I've used. I was unaware that our district had a facebook account.	Apr 16, 2012 9:35 AM
20	We use emails instead of phone now.	Apr 16, 2012 9:35 AM
21	communication is easier	Apr 16, 2012 9:26 AM
22	It has not changed it in any way. I don't use social media to see that is going on with the schools	Apr 16, 2012 9:19 AM

Q11. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your child's school and the district.		
23	More accessible and immediate	Apr 13, 2012 9:47 AM
24	No real impact--YET!	Apr 13, 2012 9:34 AM
25	I keep up with the PTO on facebook and receive voicemails and emails from the school and the lunch program.	Apr 13, 2012 9:18 AM
26	Hasn't	Apr 12, 2012 4:34 PM
27	I like direct contact with my childrens schools.	Apr 12, 2012 10:27 AM
28	It hasn't changed my communications with school.	Apr 11, 2012 1:39 PM
29	I believe that social media has changed how I communicate with my child's school or district. Instead of talking with teachers or administrators it is more likely to be commincated through e-mail.	Apr 11, 2012 11:28 AM
30	have not used it.	Apr 11, 2012 11:26 AM
31	I think it is a lot easier to communicate with my student's school through social media. It seems to be more timely as well.	Apr 11, 2012 11:24 AM
32	More informed. Get information more often.	Apr 11, 2012 11:23 AM

Q12. Describe how you would like or not like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.		
1	They need to send out more good things. I.E. when Dr. Agambu was guest of honor at the Governors state address, amount of national merit scholars, Section champs in a sport, etc.	Apr 22, 2012 7:26 AM
2	N/A	Apr 20, 2012 11:59 AM
3	I have no opinion	Apr 20, 2012 9:52 AM
4	No comment	Apr 18, 2012 11:03 AM
5	not like to see it used. I do not regard communication about school issues as "social"	Apr 18, 2012 9:57 AM
6	I do not currently support the use of facebook at the school level.	Apr 18, 2012 9:21 AM
7	The use of facebook at the school level has been good, I'd like to try Twitter and see how many would accept it	Apr 18, 2012 9:11 AM
8	no opinion	Apr 18, 2012 9:04 AM
9	Indifferent.	Apr 18, 2012 8:04 AM
10	I do not want more daily communications or PR-related frequent posts. I can't keep up with communications now.	Apr 18, 2012 7:40 AM
11	Indifferent - we aren't to be on social media during school time so for me that wouldn't be efficient, however in some instances it might be good.	Apr 18, 2012 7:29 AM
12	I think it's fine but certainly not the only means of communications. I still rely more on emails and the school and district website.	Apr 18, 2012 6:17 AM
13	?	Apr 17, 2012 9:01 AM
14	Information currently that I need on a daily basis comes in a list serv email, unless the information provided on a social media site contains more information, I will be content with my current method. I might suggest that one considers first the amount of information that teachers are asked to share on school website, the lack of consistency, the format and depth of information provided is sad.	Apr 16, 2012 12:55 PM
15	For general information, I think that something like Facebook or Twitter would be fine. For any "emergency" type information, I think that a text, school website or schoolconnects is most appropriate! Thanks!	Apr 16, 2012 11:43 AM
16	same	Apr 16, 2012 11:39 AM
17	No twitter	Apr 16, 2012 9:56 AM
18	wouldn't like things posted on FB, in case too much info/pictures/etc. are posted or commented on - could get gossipy	Apr 16, 2012 9:48 AM
19	Many of my adult friends who do have a social media account don't use it or check it as often as teenagers and college kids do. Communicating a crisis by social media sites only seems like a "hit or miss" method.	Apr 16, 2012 9:35 AM

Q12. Describe how you would like or not like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.		
20	I would like it limited. Rumors start and are passed with inadequate information.	Apr 16, 2012 9:35 AM
21	social media just for announcemtns	Apr 16, 2012 9:26 AM
22	I don't think social media should be used for anything other than fun/ sports/ educational information.	Apr 16, 2012 9:19 AM
23	Depending on severity of the issue timeliness and clarity of message need to be ratcheted up	Apr 13, 2012 9:47 AM
24	All modes of communication will eventually meet everyone's needs and skill level.	Apr 13, 2012 9:34 AM
25	text messages would be handy for short reminder messages	Apr 13, 2012 9:18 AM
26	Not sure	Apr 12, 2012 4:34 PM
27	I beleive the social media is being misused by many and needs to scrolled back.	Apr 12, 2012 10:27 AM
28	I think social media should be used to communicate events/information quickly to families, etc. I personally don't think Facebook should be a tool used by the District but understand why it is.	Apr 11, 2012 1:39 PM
29	I don't really have an opion one way or the other.	Apr 11, 2012 11:28 AM
30	again, have not used it.	Apr 11, 2012 11:26 AM
31	I would like to see it used in all aspects of educating our students and working with our staff.	Apr 11, 2012 11:24 AM
32	Would like all schools to update their information consistently	Apr 11, 2012 11:23 AM

Q13. What category does your position fall into:		
1	Administration/Parent of elem and MS children in SWC	Apr 16, 2012 12:55 PM

APPENDIX 8

Interview question results of South Washington County Schools' communications administrator: Communications Director, Barbara Brown

Conducted: Friday, April 20 at South Washington County Schools' District Service Center in Cottage Grove, Minn.

1. What are both the positive and negative effects social media has had at your school district?
 - a. *Positive effects – reaching out to a broader audience – once that I believe includes students more so than any other venue to date*
 - b. *Negative effects – increased workload for not only the implementation of such media, but tracking and posting to multiple venues. Speed at which we must keep pace with communication efforts – media playing into the mix with their desire to continue to be the first with the message – over even the district's messaging venues.*
2. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you communicate with your publics?
 - a. *Most traditional venues remain in place – always generations that seek and use varied means of getting their information. Not sure how long it will take for paper to really go away.*
3. What tools are being used at South Washington County Schools to communicate during a crisis situation?
 - a. *List-serv messages - Web site – Facebook – Twitter – word of mouth – periodic use of phones for access to people needed to support, not for rapid communication – metropolitan broadcast media.*
4. A crisis situation causes a staff/student evacuation from one of your schools. What timeframe do you believe would be appropriate to notify your publics? Have you or would you consider using social media as a medium to share information?
 - a. *Depending on the situation – the focus is on the students and those within the district needing to support. If the situation is readily accommodated – then time to gather facts and share out after the fact that the situation actually occurred and that students were safe is taken prior to a message going home at the end of (or immediately following) the school day.*
 - b. *IF the situation is long-lasting and students need to be transported off-site, then when all facts are known and a plan for their safe departure / transport is in place, a message can be shared out with internal folks first, families immediately following – and media last. (Could be 30 min – could be 2 hours) varies greatly on the situation and its severity.*
5. How often does staff, students or community member's participation on social media sites further ignite a crisis situation? Explain with an example if possible.
 - a. *I personally have no recollection of an issue –*

6. Does your school district track social media discussions about the organization, outside of its sites? If so, how often and what tools are used?
 - a. *If there is a hot topic issue that needs our attention, otherwise, as needed depending on the situation. Time again is a factor for paying close attention to what is being said about our organization. Communications has become a very large “beast” and controlling it takes more than a two-person department some days.*
7. Describe how you would like to see social media used at South Washington County Schools.
 - a. *I believe social media has a place. I also believe that with small departments in place, and the wealth of other responsibilities of a communications department to use social media as its sole focus. It will, however, continue to be one of the multiple venues of communication we use for our publics.*
8. How do you see social media shaping the future of school communications?
 - a. *The generations and their demand for communications will determine the direction. Because of the ever-changing venues – and resulting drive for information to be directed through that venue – something like this is difficult to predict.*
9. Many staff and students have cell phones. During a crisis communication they may be communicating with external publics before the district has had a chance to share information. What steps are being taken to possibly curtail this? Please share any experiences.
 - a. *Happens all the time. Curtailing would be impossible when you have 1500 students with cell phones right there. The students have just as many questions and want answers and also want to let their parents know they are ok. Administration could make the request, but not likely that it would be broadly accommodated.*
 - b. *A bomb threat at a high school (whether evacuation occurs or not) is a clear situation of the rumor mill running rampant through the student population and the cell phones. One or more kids actually see the threat on the bathroom wall – what is even said on the bathroom wall may or may not be communicated clearly through the students’ thus causing dramatic change in the message and what the school is going to do about it to be very different from student to student – and in turn, from staff member to staff member, etc.*
10. Clarity, transparency, accuracy, timeliness, patience and empathy are characteristics communicators strive for during any crisis situation. Explain how South Washington County Schools has either been successful or unsuccessful in achieving these.
 - a. *Difficult under any crisis situation is keeping everyone calm and preparing yourself prior to any messaging goes to any audience. Most successful situations for the district have been when time has been taken to gather the correct flight team, or core group of those involved to review the situation, gather facts and prepare targeted messages that will explain the situation, provide the status of the situation, and provide opportunities for either feedback or for questions to be addressed.*

- b. Unsuccessful times are when someone involved in the situation begins to share out information prior to connecting with either the superintendent or communications office. Typically, they would share more than is necessary and also something that should, in reality, not be shared (confidential via data privacy restrictions or pertinent to an investigation).*

APPENDIX 9

Interview question results of South Washington County Schools' parent: Anonymous parent of 9th and 11th grade students at Woodbury High School

Conducted: Wednesday, May 2 at South Washington County Schools' District Service Center in Cottage Grove, Minn.

1. When your school faces a crisis situation (fire, weather closure, etc.) how do you find out details and stay updated?

Through my children's Facebook pages. This year there was a student suicide at the school and my children and I found out about the situation through social media. Although I later realized that the family did not want the school to share information – it created quite a tricky situation as rumors were flying. I would prefer to hear something rather than nothing, "We had a tragedy – as soon as we are permitted to share..."

2. How often are you informed by sources other than the school district? Explain.

Most of the time I find through other sources whether it be social media and/or other parents before the school/district. A few years ago when my child was in middle school a noticeable increase in police officers could be seen. The school was completely silent as to why, I only discovered later through other parents that gang violence had broken out close by and included a connection to a student at the school. No such information was ever shared via the school or district. According to them it never happened. I believe the buzz that stems from silence is a lot worse than sharing a small snippet.

3. Is there anything about the district's crisis communication process that you think could be improved and how?

Share that something is going on even if the details cannot be shared. Silence is a lot worse. When something more can be shared then share it. The timing needs to be as close to any crisis occurring as possible. That gives control back to me as a parent as well as being respectful. It also stops the rumor mill from escalating.

4. Explain how social media has or hasn't changed the way you stay informed.

Continue to rely on e-mails for most reliable information. Phone or TV is fastest for me though. But I stay on social media to stay ahead of my teenage daughters to see what's going on, and sort of monitor their engagement with the site. More event sort of things I pay attention to the school's Facebook site – more bigger kinds of things I consult the listserv (eNews).

5. How has South Washington County Schools positively used social media?

The fact that the district is on social media sites is positive. A majority of their publics are already on – it will enable them to communicate to these folks in perhaps a way that is more convenient to them. The information shared already has been very short and straight to the point. This is a big help for us busy parents. Whereas the listserv (eNews) has far too much information that many times doesn't pertain to me or my children.

6. How has South Washington County Schools negatively use social media?

The school and district is sharing lot of events on social media, however, they're still silent on many of the big issue sorts of things.

7. How would you like to see social media being used at South Washington County Schools?
I would like to see more shared on maybe an everyday or every-other-day basis as the listserv (eNews) is. There are just so many events taking place at the high school. If a crisis situation is occurring I wouldn't mind seeing a sentence or two on that if it doesn't have to do with a particular student, such as a school closing or power failure.

8. How often does participation on social media sites further ignite a crisis situation at South Washington County Schools whether it's other parents, students or community members?
It most always does when it relates to student crisis. The student's social media sites fill with rumors about what is going on – and many times these so-called facts are not accurate.

9. How do you see social media shaping future district communications?
Social media has completely changed the way we do things. A little issue can be a big issues 100 times faster. I see Facebook users possibly moving to Google Plus in the years coming.

10. Clarity, transparency, accuracy, timeliness, patience and empathy are characteristics communicators strive for during any crisis situation. Explain how South Washington County Schools have either been successful or unsuccessful in achieving these. Communications are not always accurate. In many cases this isn't the fault of the staff at the high school, but instead from those involved not sharing full details. Anything that happens a day after is too late – information has already started flying through the rumor mill. Both the school and district are not transparent at all – I struggle with getting the details in many cases.

APPENDIX 10

Interview question results of crisis communications expert: James E. Lukaszewski

Conducted: Friday, May 4 at Risdall Public Relations in New Brighton, Minn.

1. Explain how you believe social media has or hasn't changed the way organizations communicate with their publics?

Social media is just a tool not a strategy. The business world is slow and does not really understand it, but they have been forced to move forward with it.

2. What do you believe are both the positive and negative effects social media has had on crisis communications?

Focusing on social media helps us ignore other important things such as creating strong leaders; crisis is a management problem. However suggested brief statements are usually 75-100 words; short enough to be read in 30 seconds as well as shared on social media.

3. The timeframe publics are expecting to receive information is decreasing, how would you recommend that organizations "stay ahead of the curve" so to speak?

Continue to follow the "golden hour" rule that comes from wartime battlefield medicine: one, stop the production of victims; two, manage the victim dimension, three, communicate with key audiences and internally; four, notify those requiring notification; and five, deal with the self-appointed, self-anointed.

4. In many cases, publics are finding out about crisis situations through the rumor mill. How might you suggest this be curtailed?

There is absolutely nothing that can be done by this – can only detect it.

5. Do you believe social media has taken the control of the conversation away from organizations?

No.

6. In several of your publications you share that honesty and transparency are goals for any organizations facing crisis

Silence is bad and bad news ripens.

7. You talk about stealth websites in your article "The Crisis Web Site." Should a similar plan be implemented for the social media realm?

I don't think that stealth social media sites should be created, but that these hidden websites (the organization's domain) could still be formed and pointed to during specific crisis situations from the organization's social media sites.

8. Describe how you would like to see social media being used at organizations, if at all.

I would like to social media be more influential. But again, I don't think the focus should be on this small tactic, instead on the strategies behind leadership and management.

9. How do you see social media shaping the future of school communications?
There are no concrete strategies to change social media.

APPENDIX 11

Direct observation by South Washington County Schools' employee: Communications Specialist Kay Pavel (author)

Conducted: Monday, April 9 – Thursday, May 24 at South Washington School's District Service Center in Cottage Grove, Minn.

Friday, May 4

A recent graduate of a district high school passes away from car accident injuries (18 years old). A current student of the same high school is the passenger, but escapes with non-life threatening injuries (17 years old). She was released from the hospital within a couple of hours of the accident, occurring just before 5 p.m. on Thursday, May 3. The principal of the high school was not notified of the incident until the next morning (May 4). Once the principal found out, he shared the information with district administration (superintendents and communicators). I read an e-mail that morning sent by a parent stating that rumors of a student death were being shared on Facebook. The original message was dated after 11 p.m. on Thursday night. It is later learned by administration that the passenger had shared a text message to friends about the accident and posted a photo collage of the former student along with additional details on her personal Facebook page.

Early Friday afternoon an e-mail message was shared by the school's principal detailing what had occurred, as well as a request not to pass the information along (out of respect for the family and that the city's public safety department had not officially released the names of those involved). The district notifies students and internal publics district-wide that an incident had occurred and details will be forthcoming. The particular school involved receives more information on the accident and students involved. Similar information is shared to the media, even though no communication is shared publically (via eNews or social media).

Saturday, May 5

The local newspaper updates an original article on their website with both the name of the victim that did not survive the accident and the passenger: "an e-mail to teachers at the high school Friday shared..." Through this article update, administration learns that an employee leaked information to the media. It is because of this leak that the passenger's name was shared publically without consent.

Monday, May 7

Administration seeks information on the employee that shared details with media.